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The structuration of a sporting social system? Northern Ireland fans, 'Football for All' and the creation of the 'Green and White Army'

Abstract

In terms of the extant literature to date on sport and fandom in the divided society of Northern Ireland, academic attention has focused almost exclusively upon its apparently contentious nature. However, to date there has been a dearth of actual empirical data to inform such analyses. This paper is designed to help to rectify this deficit, by drawing upon interviews with Northern Ireland football supporters and Irish Football Association staff to explore their co-creation of the 'Football for All' campaign which aimed to challenge sectarian fan behaviour within the national stadium. This resulted in the previously variegated Northern Ireland fan base becoming the 'Green and White Army' (GAWA), an informal collective identity for supporters. In continually (re)producing the GAWA as a 'social system,' it is argued that fans are knowledgeable actors who continually draw upon what Giddens (1984) refers to as practical and discursive consciousness. Informed by Giddens' structuration theory, the paper argues that *pace* the current policies of UEFA and FIFA to close stadia in the event of 'discriminatory' fan behaviour, priority should instead be given to supporting fan activism to effectively challenge such behaviour at matches; particularly given the potential for social control over supporters in a situated geographical space.

Keywords

Football fans, Northern Ireland, structuration theory, surveillance, sectarianism

On 12 June 2016, 30 years to the day since they lost to Brazil in their last appearance at a major tournament, Northern Ireland played Poland in their opening match at the EURO 2016 European Championship in France. In tandem with supporters of the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland football fans were awarded the Grand Vermeil medal by the mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, for their 'exemplary sportsmanship' displayed during the tournament (BBC, 2016). Prior to this, Northern Ireland fans had received UEFA's 'Brussels International' award in 2006 for their efforts at challenging sectarianism at matches (UEFA, 2009).

Such symbolic gestures however are far removed from the depiction of Northern Ireland supporters in the play 'A Night in November' as archetypal Ulster loyalist 'bigots' (see Jones, 2006). The play was written in the aftermath of the sectarian atmosphere surrounding the World Cup qualifying match played against the Republic of Ireland in November 1993 (Moore, 2015). Sectarian fan behaviour at this match was not however an isolated occurrence, and the highest profile incident came in February 2001 with the treatment of Celtic Football Club player Neil Lennon who was 'booed' by a hard-line Ulster loyalist group of supporters every time he touched the ball in a match against Norway in Belfast (Reid, 2008). Although Lennon had represented Northern Ireland 35 times previously without incident (Lennon, 2006: 5), his 'offence' in the eyes of this section of supporters was that by joining Celtic, a Glasgow team

with a large Irish nationalist following in Ireland, Scotland and elsewhere amongst the Irish diaspora, he had become a 'proxy warrior' for Irish republicanism (Hoberman, 1984: 6; Sugden and Bairner, 1993). In August 2002, Lennon withdrew from the squad and subsequently retired from international football after receiving a death threat, purporting to come from the Loyalist Volunteer Force (Hassan, 2005).

These issues will be discussed in detail in this paper, which aims to consider how Northern Ireland fans progressed from being criticised for espousing sectarianism from the stands to winning awards for their behaviour. Utilising some of the main insights from the structuration theory of Giddens (1984), this paper seeks to analyse the means through which Northern Ireland fans, with assistance from the Irish Football Association (IFA), altered the 'structure' of Northern Irish football fandom by manipulating the authoritative and allocative resources and 'rules' associated with supporting the team, which led to the creation of the transformed 'social system' now referred to as the 'Green and White Army'.

Although this research is based upon a single case-study, the findings have implications for other jurisdictions, particularly given the current policies of both UEFA and FIFA to close stadiums in the aftermath of 'discriminatory' small group fan behaviour.¹ Sectarianism, racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination in society, as in football, can be judged to be socially unjust within the parameters of John Stuart Mill's (1859) conceptualisation of liberty and his distinction between 'self' and 'other regarding' actions. It is one thing to consider oneself British or (Northern) Irish (or indeed both), engage in particular cultural past-times, vote as one wishes, or support particular football teams as representative of this ethno-political identity. It is quite another to take this to the level of engaging in sectarian behaviour on the terraces which harms the personal or social identity of others. Given that in the Northern Irish context, sectarianism relates to 'a relatively vague and elusive legal term' (Jarman, 2012: 2), it is used specifically in this paper to refer to the denigration by football supporters of the religious and/or political identity of the 'Other' community (in Northern Ireland this takes place predominantly within a Protestant/unionist and Catholic/nationalist context). This debate between what constitutes sectarian behaviour at football, as opposed to ethno-political expressions of fandom, is particularly relevant within Scottish football, particularly given the introduction and eventual overturning of the 'Offensive Behaviour at Football' Act (Waiton, 2018).

Football in Ireland

Association football is one of the few sports on the island of Ireland with two distinct 'national' teams (Sugden and Bairner, 1994); one representing the six counties of Northern Ireland which remains part of the United Kingdom (UK), and the other representing the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland which secured independence from the UK through the partition of the island in 1921.

A key focal point within the literature on football fandom in Northern Ireland is the pro-British symbolism and 'atmosphere' which has pervaded both local league and international matches

(Bleakney and Darby, 2018). In 1983 Linfield FC signed a long-term lease with the IFA to allow Windsor Park to be used by the Northern Ireland football team. Linfield has been supported mainly by Ulster Protestants since its formation in the late nineteenth-century (Bairner, 1997). This is most visibly manifest in the iconography of the club's red, white and blue kit which reflects the colours of the Union flag (Magee, 2005). Like Rangers FC in Glasgow, the club has in the past been accused of discriminatory employment practices (in terms of trying to avoid signing, or being perceived to be signing Catholic players, see Bairner and Walker, 2001).² This agreement between Linfield and the IFA led to Hassan et al. (2009: 749) arguing that this was further evidence of a 'unionist agenda that served to promote the football team as a symbol of British sovereignty in Northern Ireland.'

In the wake of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and continuing political violence of 'the Troubles,' the Northern Ireland team increasingly in the eyes of some supporters came to embody Protestant 'Ulster' in the context of a political conflict with Irish republicanism (Bairner, 1997).³ Windsor Park, the home ground of both Linfield and the Northern Ireland international team is located in the loyalist Village area of South Belfast, and therefore required defence (both vocally and visually) from encroachment by the enemies of the state (Bairner and Shirlow, 1998). These more extreme Protestant supporters stopped wearing green and increasingly began to wear red, white and blue to matches, the colours of the flag of the United Kingdom; thereby symbolising their political preference that Northern Ireland should remain a constituent part of the UK (Sugden and Bairner, 1993). Songs with anti-Catholic sentiments began to be sung by a minority of supporters at matches (Bairner and Darby, 1999). This led to the '...colonization of the national team by a vocal minority of openly sectarian supporters who often diverted attention from football and focused it instead on anti-Catholic vitriol' (Hassan et al., 2009: 749).

Although most of the literature on football fandom in Northern Ireland has focused on unionist hegemony and sectarianism at matches, an obvious impact of these developments has been northern Catholic alienation from both the domestic league and the Northern Ireland international team (Hassan, 2002). Cultural symbolism such as the playing of the British national anthem 'God Save the Queen' before matches further alienates Irish nationalists, with several northern Catholic footballers in recent years deciding to represent the Republic of Ireland rather than Northern Ireland.⁴

There are however limitations with the literature. While there has been some engagement with northern Catholic footballers on the 'eligibility' issue (Hassan et al., 2009; Liston and Deighan, 2018; McGee and Bairner, 2010; Murray and Hassan, 2017), there is a lack of empirical data on Northern Ireland supporters. That is not to say that the general themes referred to are not relevant, but arguably the literature has not kept pace with developments within football fandom in Northern Ireland, which Hassan and O'Kane (2012) persuasively argue it is incumbent to do. While there are some passing references to the 'Football for All'

campaign, including the assertion that ‘...the IFA deserves considerable praise for the proactive stance it has adopted in tackling the issue of community relations in Northern Ireland football and transforming the atmosphere at international games’ (Hassan et al., 2009: 749), there is little investigation into how exactly fan practices may have been impacted upon to transform the match atmosphere. Such concerns with praxis are not only crucial to the research underpinning this paper; they are also central to the structuration theory of Giddens (1984).

Giddens, structuration theory and surveillance

Unlike the social theories of Bourdieu and Elias which have been employed to analyse sociological trends within various sports, and despite its potential to illuminate empirical work within the sociology of sport, structuration theory is seldom used to do so (Horne and Jary, 2004). This is despite the assertion that structuration theory ‘challenges dominant discourses of sport fandom at either end of the macro-micro scale’ (Dixon, 2011: 282).

Giddens critiques the traditional sociological conflation of ‘social system’ with ‘structure’ which emphasises the ‘pre-eminence of the social whole over its individuals’ (Giddens, 1984: 15). His primary concern for social theory is reconnecting a knowledgeable human agent with structural explanation (Giddens, 1979). To do so, the concept of structure must be reinterpreted to relate, not to a social entity which is purely external to the human being (viz., ‘society’), but wherein ‘structure’ is both the condition and consequence of human action (Giddens, 1979). Structure is thus defined as recursively organised sets of rules and resources which are not external to individuals, but which exist as ‘memory traces’ and are instantiated in social practices (Giddens, 1984). As a result, and *pace* Durkheim, structure is not inherently constraining, but rather is always both enabling and constraining (Giddens, 1993).

Structuration theory leaves open the possibility that social rules can change over time to challenge previously accepted behaviour. It is therefore a useful heuristic to analyse any changes which may have taken place in fan practices in Northern Irish international football. Structuration theory posits that changes can occur because rules are never fixed; they are continually (re)produced in relation to social practices. Yet rules require resources to provide the means to act (Dixon, 2011). Giddens identifies two types of resources; authoritative and allocative. Authoritative resources refer to a capacity to control and command the behaviour of others while allocative resources are objects and material goods which control the patterns of human action (Giddens, 1984). In a footballing context, such material resources may include the shirts, scarves and banners that fans bring to the stadium. Giddens suggests that the significance of resources within structuration theory highlights the centrality of power to social relations given that resources, ‘provide the “material levers” of all transformation of empirical contents, including those involved in the operation of codes and norms’ (Giddens, 1979: 104). The significance of this point in relation to football fans is that certain (sub) groups of supporters may be in a greater position within the stadium to influence the behaviour of

their peers and to establish the wider norms of what behaviour is to be 'allowed' in support of the team.

Although they are not generally considered in relation to one another, Foucault agrees with Giddens that power is a type of relation between individuals, wherein the exercise of power is 'a mode of action upon the actions of others' (Faubion, 1994: 341). Foucault (1977) draws upon Bentham's 'panopticon' as the most efficient manifestation of the 'normalising gaze' through which the behaviour of prisoners is to be 'corrected'. The 'panopticon' is a central watch-tower in a circular prison structure wherein every individual prisoner can be viewed from the vantage point of a single location. While the panoptic 'gaze' is focused on individual human bodies, this is to compare and classify individuals vis-à-vis others so that they conform to what is deemed to be the 'norm' in terms of appropriate behaviour. The enclosure of physical space is crucial to disciplinary power, and classic disciplinary space tends to be cellular with individual partitions (like the modern football stadium, see Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1998; Giulianotti, 2005; King, 2010). This partitioning into rows and columns aims to 'distribute bodies in a space in which one might isolate them and map them' (Foucault, 1977: 144).

Yet while the Foucauldian tendency is to generalise from the prison metaphor and view surveillance as only constraining of human action (in a football context this tends to focus upon the restrictive impact of CCTV, stewarding/policing, and forcing fans to sit rather than stand, see Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1998; Giulianotti, 2011; Hodges, 2016; King, 2010), Giddens (1984) suggests that surveillance can be both constraining and enabling. In differing contexts what may constrain some individuals may enable the actions of others. Giddens suggests that Foucault is too eager to use evidence from the prison for other contexts in which they do not necessarily apply, and the school and the workplace are not the 'total institutions' which prisons purport to be. Pupils, patients and workers have more leeway to 'resist' and 'flout' norms than prisoners do; they have more power within the 'dialectic of control' and are not under continual surveillance.

This paper explores this issue by focusing upon the spatial dynamics and organisation deployed in the stadium during the implementation of the 'Football for All' campaign, an initiative which aimed to challenge sectarian fan behaviour at Northern Ireland matches.

Methods

This paper is based upon data from 25 semi-structured interviews conducted with Northern Ireland fans (n=21) and IFA staff (n=4) as part of a wider research programme which aimed to investigate contemporary patterns of Northern Irish international football fandom (Bell, 2017). This work built upon previous research conducted by the two co-authors on identifying barriers to inclusion for young Catholic and nationalist footballers in representing Northern Ireland (Hargie et al., 2011).

The selection strategy underpinning the recruitment of interviewees was purposive (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Within this purposive framework however 'maximum variation' sampling was also employed to 'ensure as wide a variation as possible' of experiences amongst participants (Bryman, 2012: 419). Although most supporters were from male (19) and Protestant backgrounds (18) reflecting the predominance of Protestant males amongst the fan base of the team (Bairner, 1997), in an attempt to achieve maximum variation, the cohort also included female fans (two), Catholic fans (three), a wide range of ages (from 21 to 67 years old), those who were members of supporters' clubs (nine) and those who were not (12), and those who had been directly involved in the 'Football for All' campaign (five) alongside those with no involvement (16).

Online information on the IFA website provided a list of supporters' clubs based in Northern Ireland. Ten clubs were contacted and asked if a member would be interested in participating in the research. A different approach however was required for those supporters who were not members of supporters' clubs as they are more difficult to access. A combination of 'snowball' and 'opportunistic' sampling was used in these instances (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Interviews were conducted between January and February 2016 in the aftermath of the EURO 2016 qualifying campaign. An 'interview guide' was developed with questions on various themes such as why fans supported Northern Ireland, their historical experiences of supporting the team, their thoughts on fan practices during the EURO 2016 qualifiers, and views on issues such as flags, emblems and anthems. The interviews also explored interviewees' awareness of the 'Football for All' campaign, how it worked practically, and their own impressions of it.

With the prior informed and written consent of interviewees, all interviews were digitally recorded. Interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity, and these are used throughout this paper. NVivo 10 was utilised to code, organise and analyse the interviews. Despite attempts to improve the validity of the data, all interviews ultimately lead to data which is co-constructed through dialogue between interviewer and interviewee (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). It must also be recognised that the context dependence of case-studies impacts upon their external validity and transferability to other contexts (Yin, 2009). But while the specific historical and political context within which Northern Ireland international football fandom has developed must always be borne in mind, there are enough similarities in football fandom elsewhere to suggest that the findings of this paper are relevant for football in other national contexts.

Research Findings:

The development of the 'Football for All' campaign

As Dixon (2014) notes in his study of the relationship between English football fans and 'the pub,' structuration theory helps illuminate how changing practices often come to be viewed as the 'norm' as they gradually become established in the routine of fans. Thus, Steve

commented about going ‘along with the flow’ in the 1980s and wearing a Linfield scarf to Northern Ireland matches. George remembered singing sectarian songs next to Catholic friends without really questioning what he was doing, a theme echoed by Paul who spoke about being a ‘kid’ singing sectarian and loyalist songs as ‘it just seemed to be the (done) thing.’ Chris commented that ‘we didn’t know any different’ when singing sectarian songs. These responses suggest that their fandom at this point was based upon their ‘practical consciousness’ (Giddens, 1993) which they now struggled to fully explain discursively; they were caught up in the ‘flow’ of *praxis* (Giddens, 1993) and the accepted cultural practices of football fandom at the time. Such practices were associated with a narrow form of ‘ethnic fan’ nationalism amidst political violence (Ben-Porat, 2012).

Two points are worthy of note here however. Firstly, those fans who admitted engaging in sectarian singing at matches in the past were from a mix of social backgrounds, and not only the ‘rough’ working-class males which the literature tends to suggest. Secondly, aside from issues relating to the avoidance of personal responsibility for taking part in unsavoury practices through the projection of a ‘group-think’ mentality (Janis, 1982), such fan practices did not necessarily reflect the views of the fan-base in general. Rather, they were dependent upon the influence exerted by a significant minority within the crowd and their spatial distribution in the stadium (Foucault, 1977):

‘...it was probably a 50 strong group you know, in the Kop that caused most of the damage on that night, giving Neil abuse. And when we reflected on that with fans it was actually the fans themselves identified, “Look we could have stopped that if we had our [...] group together and we are leading the singing with the (mega-phone).” So, part of the learning from what happened to Neil was we started to, in partnership with the fans, block-book chunks for the Amalgamated Northern Ireland Supporters.’ (IFA 3)

Although Reicher (2001) has argued that the contextual aspects of a football match are more important than the physical surroundings, arguably the environmental conditions at a game set the context as space is (re)created as a social product (Lefèbvre, 1974: 30). Members of the Amalgamation of Official Northern Ireland Supporters’ Clubs (AONISC), which had formed in 1999, recalled that the block-booking was targeted on those specific parts of the stadium where most of the sectarian singing was coming from. The rationale associated with the block-booking of match tickets was twofold. Firstly, fans would have to supply their names and addresses to purchase tickets to sit in these seats and hence should someone engage in sectarian behaviour within the stadium they would be more easily identified and dealt with accordingly. Foucault’s (1977) and Giddens’ (1984) insistence on the collation of information and knowledge as a means of surveillance appears relevant in these terms. Secondly, the block booking of tickets was to coordinate efforts to challenge those singing sectarian songs:

‘The players - there’s Catholic players on the team. How are they motivated when the fans in the stands are singing, you know, “We are up to our necks in fenian blood?” How does that motivate anybody? That’s not right. Let’s change it. So we needed something to take the place of the sectarian singing and songs, right? So, we had to invent different songs. There was the “Green and White Army” chant. There’s “We’re not Brazil, we’re Northern Ireland.” There was “Sweet Caroline,” we adopted it to “Sweet Northern Ireland” and stuff like that.’ (George)

Crucial to ensuring that the singing of these new songs was promoted amongst the wider collective in the stadium was the ‘analytical arrangement of space’ which is characteristic of panopticism in a disciplinary society (Foucault, 1977: 203). A small number of fans with megaphones could be placed within the mass, and the few could survey the many and draw upon the rest of the crowd to ‘correct’ their (mis)behaviour when appropriate. Those AONISC members, such as George, who were directing the crowd in song are reminiscent, not only of the ‘Ultra’ ‘cheerleaders’ whose role tends not to be referred to in the Northern Irish literature (Kennedy, 2013; see also Granström, 2011); but of Bourdieu’s ‘spokesmen’ who are granted ‘tacit delegation’ of the group’s authority, constantly recalling the collective to the values that it officially recognises (Bourdieu, 1977: 193):

‘I remember being at the back of the stand. And you would start a chant and you would see everybody around you, look over the Kop, and you would see it spreading across, you know? So, it started in this wee hub...’ (George)

The initial problems with challenging sectarianism were inherently linked to Northern Ireland fans feeling like separated individuals, and the block-booking of tickets as part of the ‘Football for All’ campaign worked to give them a collective ‘voice’ through spatial redistribution. Foucault’s analysis of the simultaneous individualising and collectivising of surveillance seems prescient here; those engaging in sectarian singing in the stadium were individualised, differentiated and judged while those opposed were collectivised and their songs in response ‘normalised’:

‘The bigot was isolated and no longer did they feel comfortable...we were starting to say, “Look would you stop swearing? There’s kids.” You know, having that confidence to do that? I think we needed sufficient numbers.’ (Steve)

While both Foucault and Giddens convincingly argue that power is not merely ‘possessed’ and tends to reside in the collective, Giddens’ assertion that surveillance is not only constraining but also enabling appears to be more relevant to an analysis of ‘Football for All’ practices in the stadium. Although those fans who wished to engage in sectarian singing may have felt restricted in terms of their actions, those opposed to this behaviour felt empowered and were given a voice to challenge it. A more useful conceptualisation of the reported changes which were implemented is Giddens’ (1984) definition of social structure as rules and resources

which are open to change. Through the spatial organisation of fans and the role of AONISC members in the initial stages of the campaign, there was a capacity as Giddens would have it, to control and command the behaviour of others. Two of the three key features which Giddens (1984) associates with authoritative resources appear to be relevant in this regard; the organisation of social time-space and the organisation and relation of human beings in mutual association.

That members of the AONISC became aware of the significance of their spatial distribution within the confines of the stadium itself also played a significant role in the ability to hold effective displays involving the wearing of green shirts, green wigs, green face paint, flags and card displays; in other words, to gain control over the distribution of allocative (or material) resources (Giddens, 1984). All these practices were conducted under the auspices of the 'Sea of Green' initiative which encouraged supporters to wear the team colours to the match, rather than Glasgow Rangers or Linfield shirts (red, white and blue). Efforts on these two fronts during the 'Football for All' campaign (in terms of manipulating vocal utterances and visual symbolism) led to the creation of the 'Green and White Army' (GAWA), the name given to the Northern Ireland fans by themselves, the IFA and the media.

'We're not Brazil...We're Northern Ireland': The creation of the GAWA

Like the Scottish 'Tartan Army' (Giulianotti, 1991, 1995), GAWA fandom has similarly attempted to project a positive and 'fun' social identity for Northern Ireland fans. Jo, who attended Northern Ireland's 4-0 loss to England in Manchester in 2005 compared Northern Ireland fans to England fans: 'We've lost so many campaigns, but we still keep going! And we still keep cheering. And England fans can't understand – "why do you still cheer?"' (Jo).

The point here of being able to laugh despite adversity was one referred to by other fans who spoke of the 'dark' humour of people from Northern Ireland as one of the coping mechanisms developed to deal with the trauma of the 'Troubles' (Garrrick, 2006). Such views also correspond with socio-psychological research which has found that stereotypes can become internalised and used as a means of establishing an in-group identity which can be distinguished from out-group neighbouring countries (Lönngqvist et al., 2014). This Northern Irish stereotype and sense of self-deprecation has become vital to the idea of the GAWA and Northern Ireland's status as an ontological entity which is distinct from *both* the Republic of Ireland *and* the rest of the UK. The 'jocularity' and humour of fans helps to promote 'solidarity' amongst the GAWA (Pearson, 2012) and transmits the message to listeners that Northern Ireland fans are only interested in verbally abusing themselves and not others through sectarian discourse (Sharpe and Hynes, 2016):

'It almost got to a point during the game where it was being done as a laugh (singing Green and White Army), you know, because people were laughing as they were doing

it because they were sort of saying, “This is ridiculous, how long this has gone on for!” And it was almost, like, unsaid like, “Let’s see how long we can keep it going for?” (Dylan)

Given such a focus placed upon humour and poking fun at oneself within the football ‘carnival’ (Giulianotti, 1995; Pearson, 2012), Northern Ireland fan Stewart McAfee wrote the humorous song ‘We’re not Brazil, we’re Northern Ireland’ which, with tongue firmly in cheek, lyrically compares the on-pitch prowess of Northern Ireland to the footballing elite of Brazil. This song has become a dominant ‘mnemonic device’ (Robson, 2000) within the GAWA and now adorns many fan flags and t-shirts. Although Northern Ireland fans would not tend to use the term ‘brand’ when referring to themselves, this is arguably what the GAWA has become at some level, a form of ‘brandom’ which combines fandom with consumerism (Guschwan, 2012). Yet the green shirt for Northern Ireland fans is much more than a mere ‘couture aesthetic’ (Giulianotti, 2002: 39); for as Niall suggested, ‘Green is Northern Ireland. Green and white is what we are.’ The significance of the green shirt for many fans also related to publicly displaying an aspect of their ‘Irishness’; albeit that this sense of Irish identity was different to the narrower historical equating of Irishness with Catholicism, nationalism, the Irish language and Gaelic Games (Elliott, 2009). Paul recalled attending matches in the late 1960s when ‘in those days you used to sing ‘Ireland’ and all...it wasn’t ‘Northern Ireland’. It was ‘Ireland, Ireland’, and ‘we’ll support you ever more.’ Match programmes from the 1950s and 1960s appear to corroborate such fan testimonies. Programmes regularly included the lyrics of songs for fans to sing at the games and included Irish ballads such as ‘When Irish Eyes are Smiling’ and ‘It’s a long way to Tipperary’ (Fulton, 2005).

The alteration of the allocative (visual change) and authoritative resources (vocal change) at matches was required prior to any attempt to change normative fan behaviour, because as previously noted, rules require resources to provide the means to act (Dixon, 2011). Individuals may not necessarily be able to discursively formulate these ‘rules,’ but they can challenge others when they are perceived to have been breached (Winch, 1958):

‘There was two fellas pulled out a UVF flag (in June 2001), right? I went down to them and I said “Look, lads what are you doing? Do you understand this is the Green and White Army now? Put that flag away.” They went “OK” and put the flag away. And to me that’s where we felt that we could now start to - anybody there could influence change.’ (Steve)

But despite many agreeing with Dylan’s point ‘that supporting Northern Ireland has become more acceptable’ in wider society, most fans felt that the team remained primarily supported by Protestants and unionists, and ‘anyone that says it isn’t is kidding themselves’ (Danny). Indeed, despite the challenging of sectarian fan practices in the stadium, fans suggested that it was much more difficult to do this in bars and pubs, the private ‘back-stage’ area where

social norms tend to be relaxed (Goffman, 1959), as the spatial organisation and control of supporters is much less coordinated:

'I see a wee bit of it creeping in there on the odd away game, just a wee bit there...I mean, I personally have intervened a couple of times maybe with a few drinks and said, "Stop singing those songs."' (Paul)

Even within the context of fan behaviour in the stadium, non-sectarianism does not equate with being non-political. That the 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1977) or 'stocks of knowledge' (Schutz, 1967) associated with the Northern Ireland team retain a linkage with wider unionist parental culture is undeniable. One such symbol which remains is the playing of the British national anthem, 'God Save the Queen' at Northern Ireland matches. In line with previous research on the playing of anthems in sport (Hargie et al., 2015), fans were divided over the anthem. While some felt it made 'the hairs stand up on the back of your neck' (Steve and Stewart), others felt it was not particularly in keeping with the ethos of inclusion which the 'Football for All' campaign had espoused. While perhaps unsurprisingly Catholic fans such as Conor were in favour of a change ('It's not my anthem'); many supporters from Protestant and unionist backgrounds also advocated an alternative, such as a 'Northern Ireland national anthem' (Brian).

An additional issue with regards the anthem is that in the pause after the third line 'God save our Queen' and before the beginning of the next line 'Send Her victorious,' a small group of loyalist supporters still shout out the Ulster loyalist slogan 'No surrender.' In popular culture the phrase is most commonly associated with the 1689 Siege of Derry, which is a symbolically significant event for the Ulster Protestant community; but during the violence of the 'Troubles' the slogan became associated with 'No surrender (to the IRA)'. Even fans who wanted to retain the anthem felt uncomfortable with such behaviour: 'I would prefer it sung as it is supposed to be with that no surrender taken out of it' (Chris). Others spoke of their embarrassment and even anger at those who engage in the shout, referring to it as making them feel 'ashamed' (Steve) and 'I just cringe when I hear it' (Gareth).

Those who shout out 'No surrender' are aware that this is one moment when they can openly challenge 'Football for All' values and attempt to reassert some form of power within the constraints of the 'dialectic of control' (Giddens, 1979). This dialectic suggests that even where a power imbalance between individuals or social groups exists, the 'subordinate' group can always 'resist' and exercise some element of power over the 'super-ordinates' (Giddens, 1984). Such fans can be 'calculating' towards the adherence of 'normative rules' and may in some cases weigh up the risks of deviating from the norm if they feel they may be able to escape sanction by others (Giddens, 1979). While Catholic fan Michael welcomed standards such as 'Green and White Army,' he added:

'It's ('No surrender') still probably one of the last things that are there, you know? You've no more "Billy Boys," "Sash," whatever else being sung. But that's still one of the more slightly uncomfortable things that makes you think, "Am I really welcome?"' (Michael)

Whether a change of anthem would encourage higher levels of Catholic support for the team is debateable, given that the research would suggest that complex and interlinking factors such as national identity, family connections, perceptions of the IFA, the historical legacy of sectarianism in Northern Irish soccer, the influence of dissident republican paramilitary activity in some areas and the related threat from them to players who opt for Northern Ireland, and indeed footballing expediency, also impact upon some northern Catholics choosing to support (or play for) the Republic of Ireland over Northern Ireland (Liston and Deighan, 2018; McGee and Bairner, 2010; Murray and Hassan, 2017). Yet most fans (and IFA staff) interviewed felt that it was one area which the 'Football for All' campaign needed to address. The anthem is a crucial issue because of its symbolic significance, and it remains a potential barrier to broadening out the appeal of the Northern Ireland team as one fully representative of the whole community.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that while the literature has focused almost exclusively upon the symbolic significance of the Northern Ireland team for Ulster Protestants during the 'Troubles,' it has largely overlooked the developments within the fan culture which emerged in the aftermath of the 'Football for All' campaign. In the context of a more peaceful political dispensation which created the space for less antagonistic fan practices to emerge, Northern Ireland fans became increasingly aware of a wider perception of them as 'sectarian bigots,' and along with the IFA, they altered the 'structure' of Northern Irish fandom by changing the authoritative and allocative resources and 'rules' associated with supporting the team, which led to the creation of the transformed 'social system' otherwise referred to as the GAWA. Crucial in this regard was the spatial distribution and organisation of fans in the stadium. Giddens' definition of surveillance as enabling as well as constraining of action arguably helps explain how a group of moderate and inclusive fans could challenge the practices of a sub-group espousing sectarianism within their midst. This is a key point, given the propensity within the wider literature to theorise upon surveillance in Foucauldian terms as only external to and constraining of football fan practices.

In keeping with structuration theory, this 'structural continuity' of the fan collective is not unceasing; rather it is always open to change and (re)negotiation given that the GAWA is continually (re)created and brought into being through fan *praxis*. As Giddens argues (1995: 27), the 'seeds of change are present in every moment of the constitution of social systems across time and space.' Football fan culture is fluid, heterogeneous and continually evolving and there are sub-groups within the GAWA with differing and competing ideas as to what

form supporting the team should take. Power relations within the fan base and the control of resources therefore remain important in internal struggles for legitimacy and who defines which fan practices are deemed to be (un)acceptable.

There are also lessons which can be learnt from 'Football for All' for other contexts. A challenge which educational approaches to tackling racism and sectarianism face is that they do not directly address fan behaviour *in situ* and tend to ignore the significance of the spatial distribution of supporters in the stadium, which is crucial to creating the 'atmosphere' at a football match (Kennedy, 2013). As Giddens (1984) suggests, a change in *praxis* can in fact change the social 'rules' of acceptable behaviour (and vice versa). This implies, that as in 'Football for All,' one does not necessarily have to start with longer-term attitudinal change, but rather can focus on practical behaviour and the spatial distribution of supporters. Ownership of the new 'social system' is also crucial, so that it then becomes part of the fans' identity and leads to internal monitoring and self-policing.

From 1st June 2013, UEFA enacted new regulations which allowed for the partial or full closing of football stadia in the event of 'racist and/or discriminatory' fan behaviour (UEFA, 2016: 13; see also FIFA, 2011: 33-34). However, in an open letter to UEFA, the committee of Football Supporters Europe argued that the policy not only punishes the innocent along with the guilty, but that 'the racists are still inside the stadium and perform racist acts, just in a different area - non-racist/anti-racist fans don't feel safe and empowered to initiate their own activities' (FSE, 2016).

The crucial issue here is about making fans 'feel safe' and 'empowered' to 'initiate their own activities.' Football governing bodies and clubs themselves can engage with supporters, listen to them, and if possible, fund their proposed alternative practices in the stadium. The ethical and financial benefits will far outweigh the costs of such measures. If 'Football for All' has highlighted anything, it is that when fans are engaged with and asked for their ideas by governing bodies, they are more than open to challenge those within their midst with whom they profoundly disagree.

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Notes

¹ Under Article 14 of their disciplinary regulations, UEFA (2016: 13) refer to 'racist, other discriminatory conduct and propaganda' as including insulting 'the human dignity of a person or a group of persons on whatever grounds, including skin, colour, race, religion, or ethnic origin.' Article 58 of FIFA's disciplinary code refers to discrimination as referring to 'Anyone who offends the dignity of a person or group of persons through contemptuous, discriminatory, or denigratory (sic) words or actions concerning race, colour, language, religion, or origin' (see FIFA, 2011: 33).

² This accusation has, however, been challenged, with Brodie (1990) pointing out that players of many faiths (and none) have played for Linfield for many decades. The club currently has many Catholic players at all levels, particularly within the youth teams.

³ There is a tendency for some northern Protestants to use 'Ulster' as a synonym for Northern Ireland as an entity. However, Ulster historically is one of the four Irish Provinces and has nine counties including Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan which are part of the Republic of Ireland.

⁴ A decision reached by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne in 2010 on the eligibility of Daniel Kearns ruled that as a result of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998, individuals born in Northern Ireland are entitled to represent *either* Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

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